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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* As Fourth World Conference on Women continues general exchange of views, speakers focus on violence against women, poverty and right to choice; 5,200 delegates and 3,700 NGO representatives participate in Conference.

* NATO continues air strikes against Bosnian Serb military targets to ensure removal of heavy weapons from Sarajevo exclusion zone.

* Secretary-General welcomes installation of Council of State and establishment of cease-fire in Liberia; stresses need for national reconciliation, disarmament and demobilization.

* ICRC appeals to donor governments for 153 million Swiss francs to cover operations in 1995; says budget has risen to meet overwhelming humanitarian needs.

* Secretary-General recommends Security Council establish Commission of Inquiry to address alleged arms flows to former Rwandan government forces in Great Lakes region.

* UNDP Administrator says Programme is undergoing extensive and rapid reform; proposes 11 per cent volume reduction in gross core budget for 1996-1997.

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The Fourth World Conference on Women today continued its general exchange of views on key issues affecting the realization of the rights of women, with some speakers focusing on violence against women, poverty and the right to choice. The United Kingdom's Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Minister for Overseas Development, Baroness Chalker of Wallasey, emphasized the need for a more equal sharing of parental and household responsibilities, as well as the importance of choice for women. She said women's lack of choice perpetuated patterns of gender inequality from one generation to the next.

Mary Ann Glendon of the Holy See expressed support for the affirmation in the draft platform for action that responsibility in sexual matters belonged to both men and women. She said that women were most often the

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victims of irresponsible sexual behaviour, and that their health was threatened by widespread attitudes towards permissiveness. She highlighted the issue of coercion in population politics, stressing that abortion should not be promoted as a means of family planning.

Yesterday, the European Union declared its support for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health for women and men, and indicated that it would welcome an agreement on a reference to sexual rights in the platform for action. Speaking on behalf of the Union, Spanish Minister for Social Affairs Cristina Alberdi stressed the importance of gender-sensitive development cooperation. Gender equality in political decision-making was essential for strengthening democracy, she went on to say.

The Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima, told the Conference that health was crucial to economic and social development, and that women's needs must be given priority. Promoting women's health was the surest way of ensuring health for all. He underlined the importance of education, including health education, in enhancing the status of women, adding that education on gender equality must not be directed towards girls alone.

Meanwhile, the Main Committee was continuing negotiations on the draft declaration and platform for action, under the chairmanship of Patricia Licuanan (Philippines). The Committee was supported by two Working Groups, which formed Contact Groups to facilitate progress on the draft declaration and health issues. As of today, a total of 16,552 participants had registered to participate in the Conference, including 5,194 delegates and 3,742 representatives of non-governmental organizations.

In her opening address to the NGO Forum last week, Conference Secretary-General Gertrude Mongella said non-governmental organizations had a vital role to play in the struggle for women's equality. They must work cooperatively with government delegations to produce documents that defined the commitments, actions and accountability of all concerned with women's rights.

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) today launched further air strikes against Bosnian Serb military installations in a wider zone of action around Sarajevo, according to a United Nations spokesman. He said that there had been no indication that the Bosnian Serbs intended to remove their heavy weapons from the 20-kilometre exclusion zone around the city, and that the air strikes would thus continue. However, rain and low clouds hampered NATO operations today.

The spokesman described the mood in Sarajevo as relaxed, noting that the streets there were crowded with pedestrians. There were only 168 firing incidents yesterday, although an artillery exchange initiated by Bosnian

Government forces last night left two civilians injured. The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) issued a formal protest afterwards.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has welcomed the installation of the Council of State of Liberia on 1 September and the establishment of the cease-fire there on 26 August. In a message to the Chairman of the Council of State, Wilton Sankawulo, he said the country was at an important stage in the process of peace.

The Secretary-General stressed that Liberia's gains must be consolidated through national reconciliation, disarmament and demobilization. He added that he was ready to assist the Council of State in any way he could in the implementation of the Abuja Agreement.

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The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) today launched a renewed appeal to donor governments for another 153 million Swiss francs ($126 million) to cover its operations in 1995. The ICRC initially appealed for 511 million francs ($422 million) for the year. However, it had to increase its budget to a total of 620 million francs ($512 million) to meet overwhelming humanitarian needs in Chechnya, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Somalia.

"The donor fatigue of certain governments can place the ICRC in a serious financial crisis, but we remain optimistic that the money needed can be raised," said Christian Kornevall, Head of the ICRC's Communication and External Resources Department.

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The Secretary-General has recommended that the Security Council establish a Commission of Inquiry to address alleged arms flows to former Rwandan government forces in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa. In a letter to the Council President issued today, he said the Commission would be an important element in preventing renewed conflict in the region. It would investigate reported violations of the arms embargo imposed by resolutions 918 (1994) and 1011 (1995), and allegations that the former government forces were receiving military training in order to destabilize Rwanda. It would also attempt to identify parties aiding or abetting the illegal acquisition of arms by those forces and recommend measures to deal with the problem.

The Commission would need access to relevant sources of information, the Secretary-General continued. The Council should thus request States, international and other organizations, and private individuals to provide the necessary information and to furnish any other assistance that might be

required. The Commission would also need the full cooperation and support of the governments in whose territories it would conduct investigations.

The Secretary-General would appoint an eminent person as the Commission's Chairman, to be assisted by five to ten legal, military and police experts and the appropriate support staff. The Commission would be financed through the regular budget of the United Nations. However, pending approval of the its budget, Member States would be asked to provide voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund for Rwanda so that the Commission could begin its work immediately.

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The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is in the midst of extensive and rapid reform and the positive results of such change should not be underestimated, according to its Administrator, James Gustave Speth. In a report to the UNDP's Executive Board, which meets at Headquarters next week, he proposed a volume reduction of $52 million in the Programme's gross core budget for 1996-1997, resulting in savings of about 11 per cent. Mr. Speth said his main objective was to maximize resources available for programme and programme support activities.

According to the report, UNDP's core budget has been reduced by a total of $105 million since 1992. Headquarters core staff will have been reduced by 31 per cent, and country offices by 11 per cent. The reduction in headquarters staff includes the elimination of 20 Professional and 30 General Service posts. The post reduction in country offices includes the phasing-out of 85 international Professional posts -- partly offset by an increase of 20 national Professional posts -- and the elimination of 229 General Service posts.

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